Discussion Strategies for Meaningful, Effective Conversation Practice

Have you ever asked students to discuss a reading, topic, or film only to have the room go quiet?

In this webinar, we will:

- explore discussion formats that keep students engaged and focused while upholding individual accountability
- identify benefits of student discussions for critical thinking and language learning
- outline specific ways to help your students engage and connect meaningfully in English conversation practice

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AE

Kelley Calvert

Kelley has worked in international education for over a decade. She currently works as the Instruction and Curriculum Coordinator at Chiang Mai International School in Thailand. She is also working on a U.S. Department of State English Language Specialist digital storytelling and mentoring project with teachers in Brazil.

She was formerly an assistant professor and the Graduate Writing Center coordinator at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies. Kelley served as an English Language Fellow in Chiang Mai, Thailand and as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Benin.

Kelley has a BFA in Writing, Literature, and Publishing from Emerson College in Boston and a MA in TESOL from the Middlebury Institute of International Studies in Monterey.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Discussion Strategies for Meaningful, Effective Conversation Practice

© 2020 by Kelley Calvert. *Discussion Strategies for Meaningful, Effective Conversation Practice* for the American English Live Teacher Professional Development Series, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. government and administered by FHI 360. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License, except where noted. To view a copy of the license, visit: http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Why talk about different discussion formats?

- Acknowledge variations in our classrooms
- Address differing learning styles
- Allow for differentiation in instruction

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Structure of Today's Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AE

Structure of Today's Session

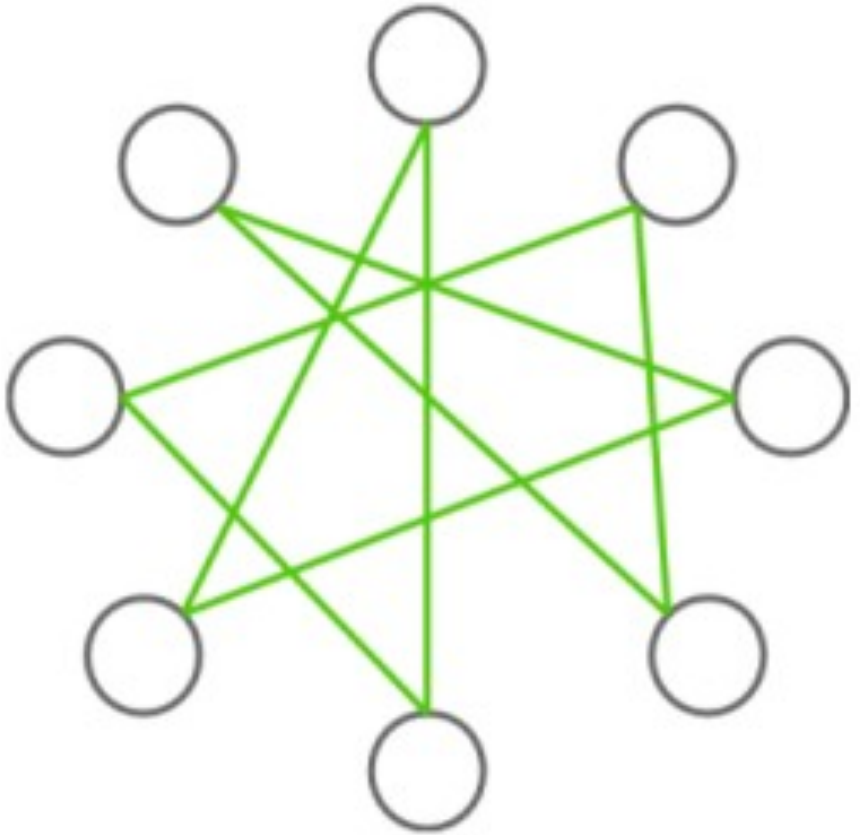
1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

What is your favorite way to get students talking?

The Spider Web Icebreaker

- Say your name and something about yourself.
- Toss the ball of wool to the next person.
- Keep going until everyone has shared.



Structure of Today's Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Principles of Communicative Language Teaching

- Make **real communication** the focus of language learning.
- Provide **opportunities for learners to experiment** and try out what they know.
- Be **tolerant of learners' errors** as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
- Classroom activities should be **meaningful** and involve **real communication**.

(*Communicative Language Teaching Today,* Richards, 2006)

Structure of Today's Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AE

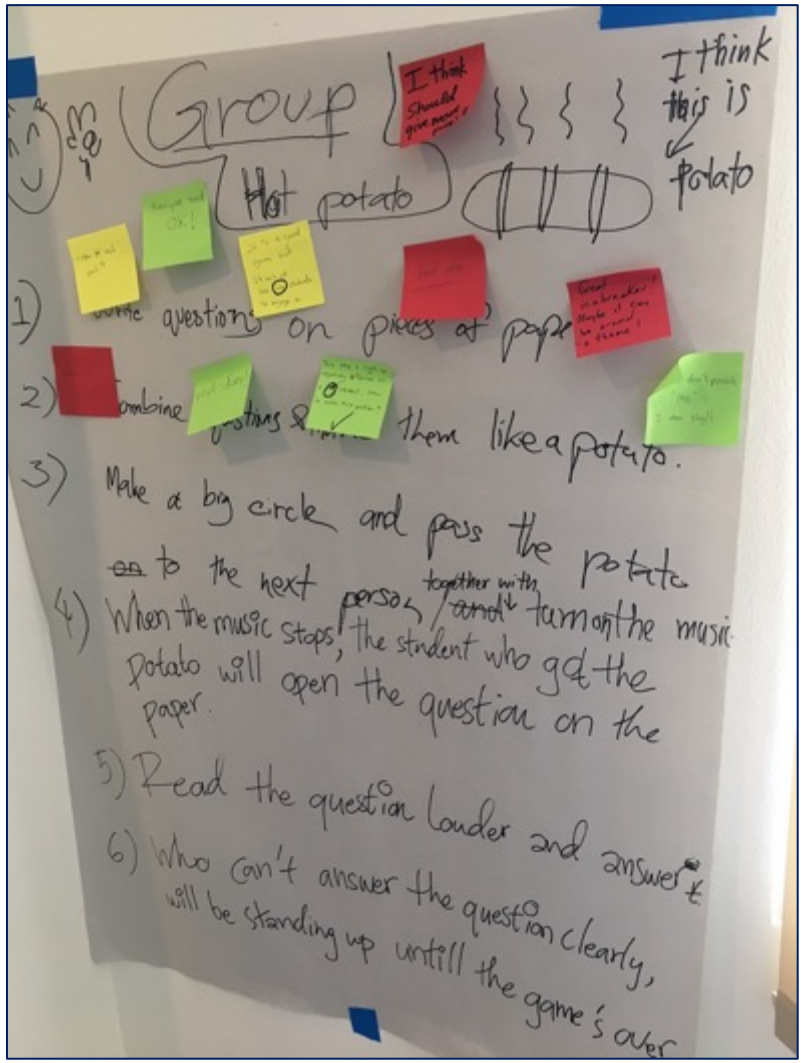
What are some advantages and disadvantages to group discussion?

Advantages to Group Discussion

- "All of us is smarter than one of us."
- Creativity
- Memory
- Insight into self
- Insight into others
- Teamwork

(Burke, 2011)

Disadvantages to Group Discussion



- Conformity
- Domination
- Laziness
- Difficult to Assess

(Burke, 2011)

Structure of Today's Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AE

Addressing Disadvantages:
What makes group work successful?

- The group has a clear objective, a tangible outcome or product.
- Every member of the group has a role.
- Members are held responsible for that role.
- Every member of the group is necessary to complete the task.
- Discussions reflect real life (CLT).

Addressing Disadvantages:
What makes group work successful?

- The group has a clear objective, a tangible outcome or product.
- Every member of the group has a role.
- Members are held responsible for that role.
- Every member of the group is necessary to complete the task.
- Discussions reflect real life (CLT).

Why do we have discussions in real life?

- Make decisions
- Give/Share opinions
- Create something
- Solve a problem

(*Communicative Language Teaching Today,* Richards, 2006)

Structure of Today's Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion

Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion

Inner Circle – Outer Circle

- Can be shorter (standing) or longer (sitting) to get students interacting.
- Reduces anxiety about speaking in front of the class.

Inner Circle - Outer Circle: Small Talk

Phoom: Hi, I'm Phoom! What's your name?

Yeji: I'm Yeji. Nice to meet you.

Natalya: **What do you like to do after school?**

Jip: **I play volleyball. How about you?**

- **Timing: 30 sec. to 5 min.**
- **Two Circles: inner - outer**
- **Introduction + Small Talk**

Ideas for Large or Low-level Classes

My partner's name:	**My partner's name:**	**My partner's name:**
Something I learned about _____ during small talk:	Something I learned about _____ during small talk:	Something I learned about _____ during small talk:

- **For low- or mixed-level classes:**
  - Allow students to write down ideas first.
  - Use a graphic organizer.
- **For large classes:**
  - Instead of a circle, let students talk with nearby classmates.

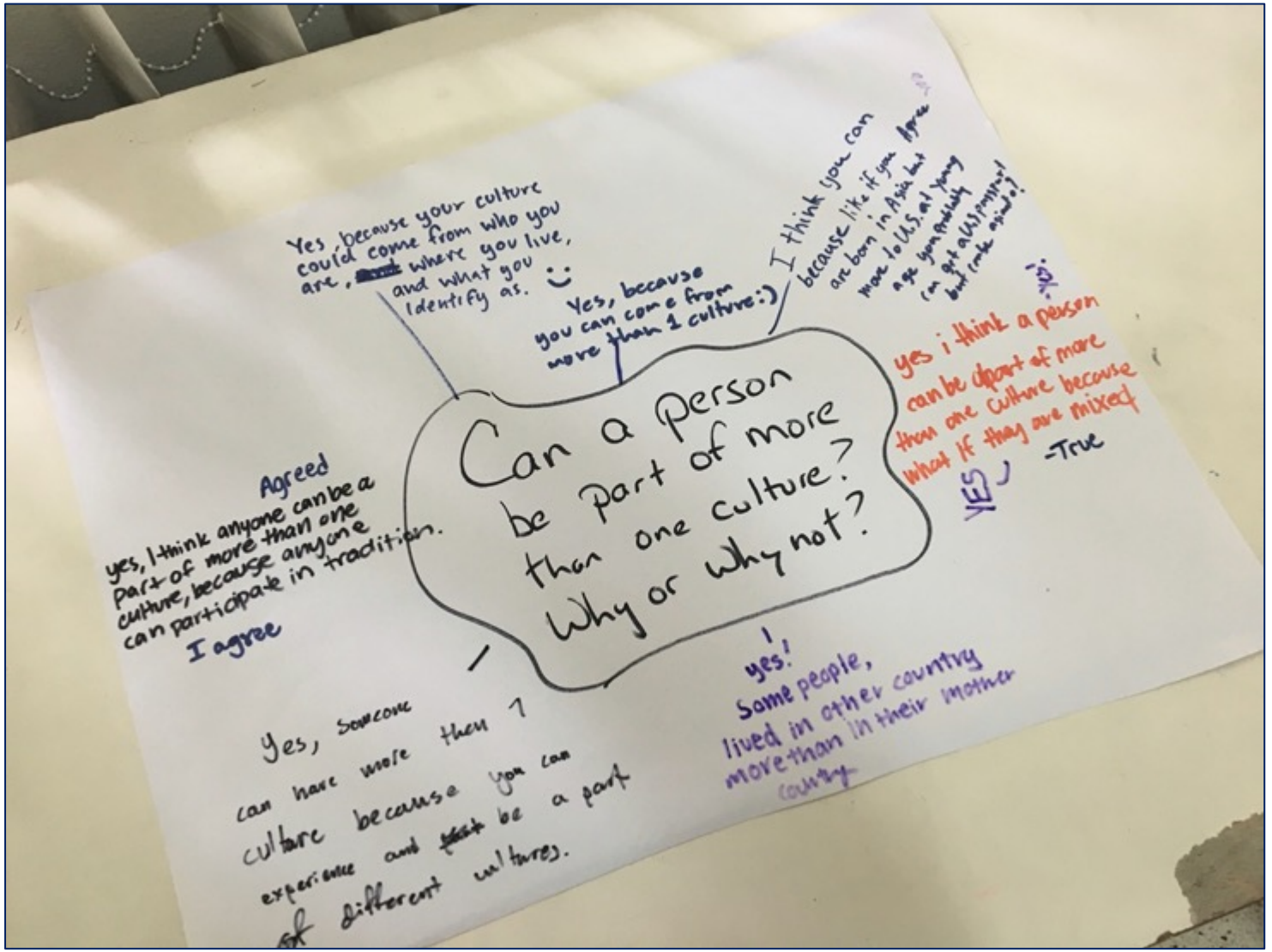
Note: Walk around and informally assess. You can collect handout for formative assessment.

What challenges might you face in your classrooms using inner circle – outer circle?

Four Practical Activities

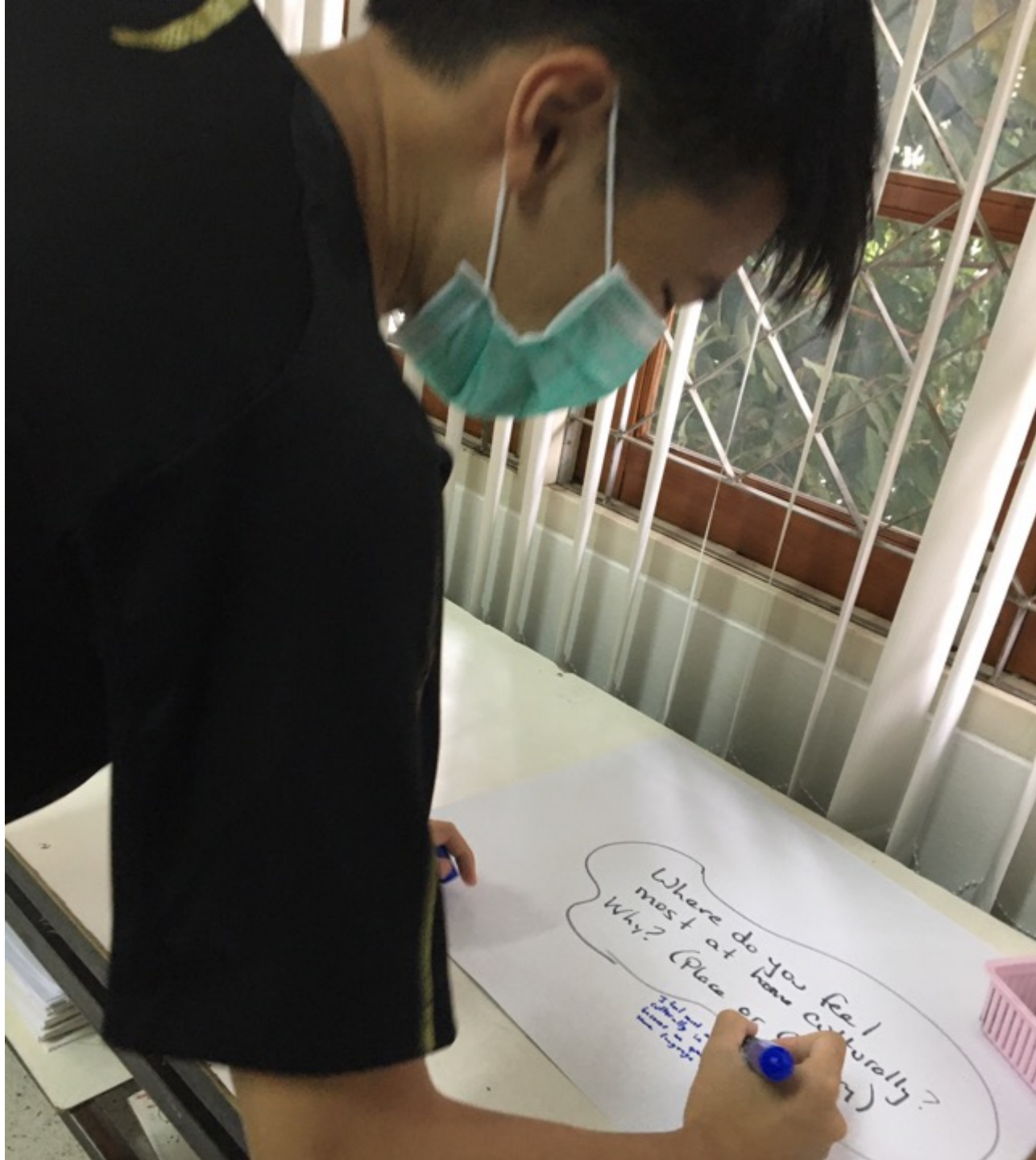
1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion

Chalk Talk: A Silent Conversation



Chalk Talk

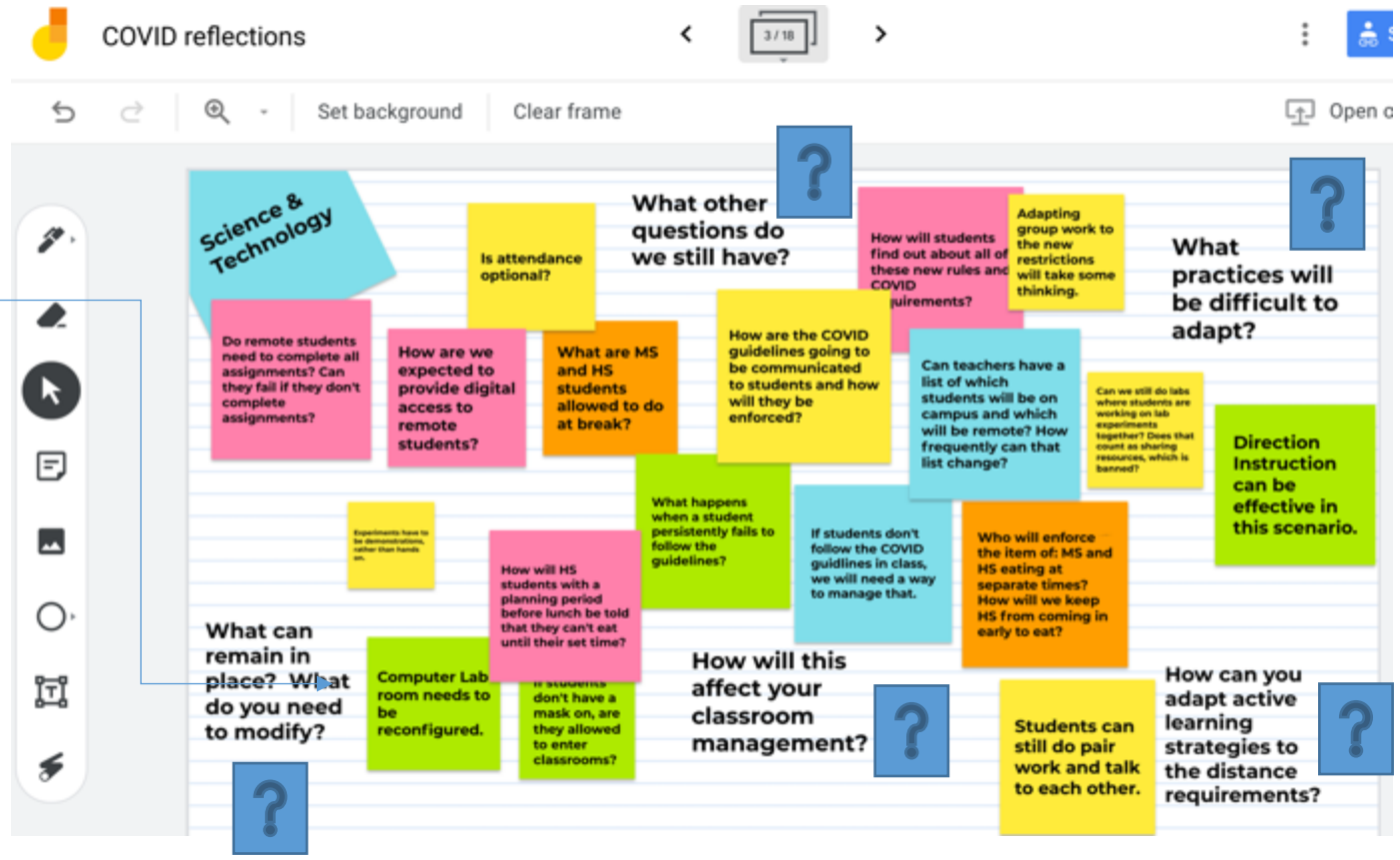
- A written, silent discussion.
- T prepares by writing one question per poster around the room.
- Ss spend 1-2 minutes at each poster.
  - Ss can respond to the question or other classmates' comments.
  - Ss can draw responses (learning styles).
- Ss return to original poster and share what they find interesting to conclude the activity.



A Variety of Classrooms

Digital Chalk Talk

- T prepares by writing questions on digital platform.
- Ss are put into small breakout rooms for set time.
- Each group discusses questions.
- Each group has one note-taker who writes responses on the Jamboard or Padlet.
- Debrief as a whole group.

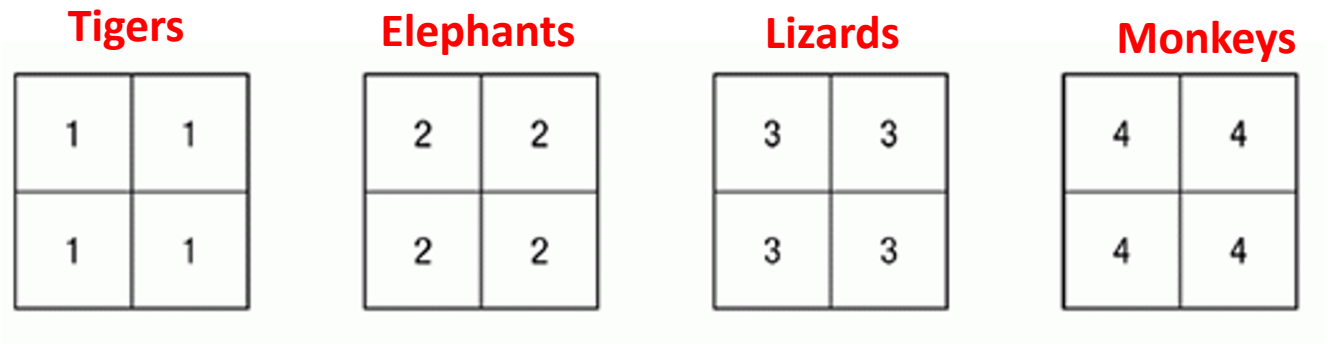


Google Jamboard or Padlet

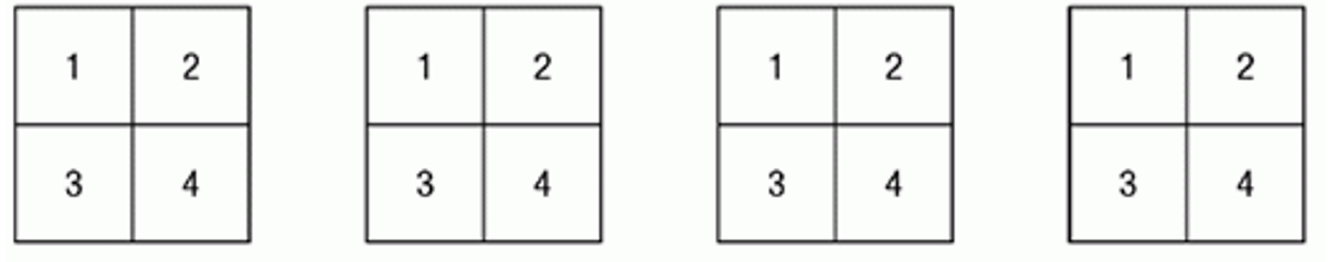
Four Practical Activities

1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion

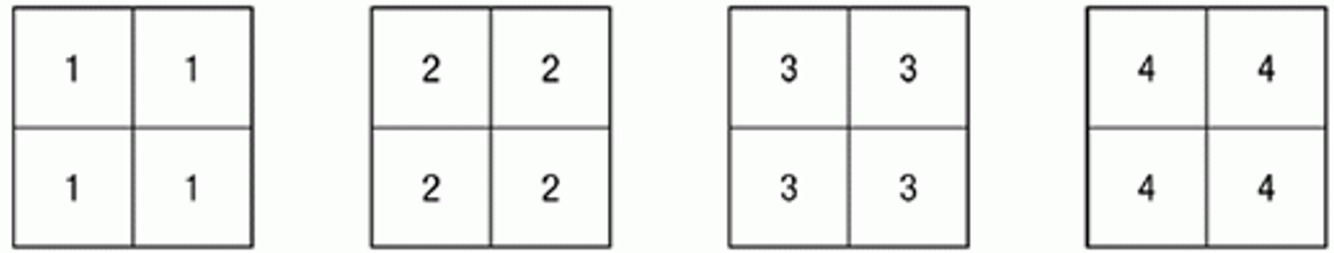
For those who use it, what do you like about jigsaw discussions?



Phase 1: Learn everything you can about a topic (animals)

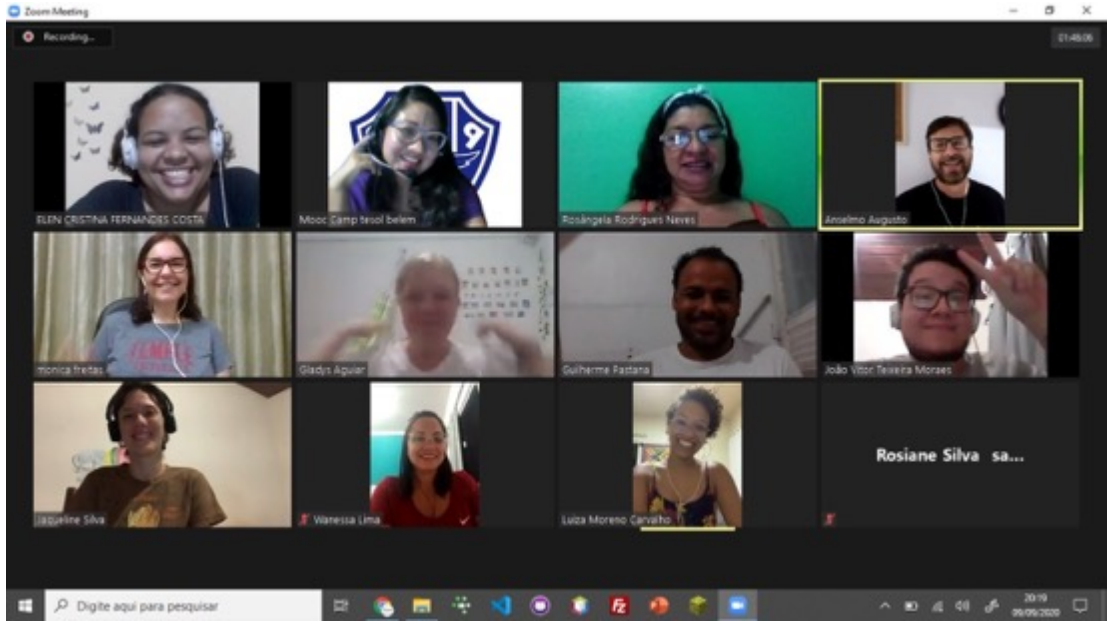


Phase 2: Teach your classmates about your topic.



Phase 3: Review what you learned with classmates.

Variation for 2020-2021:
Jigsaws Work in Breakout Rooms!



Round 1:

- **<u>Breakout Room 1</u>**: Reasons why school should be 100 percent online during the pandemic.

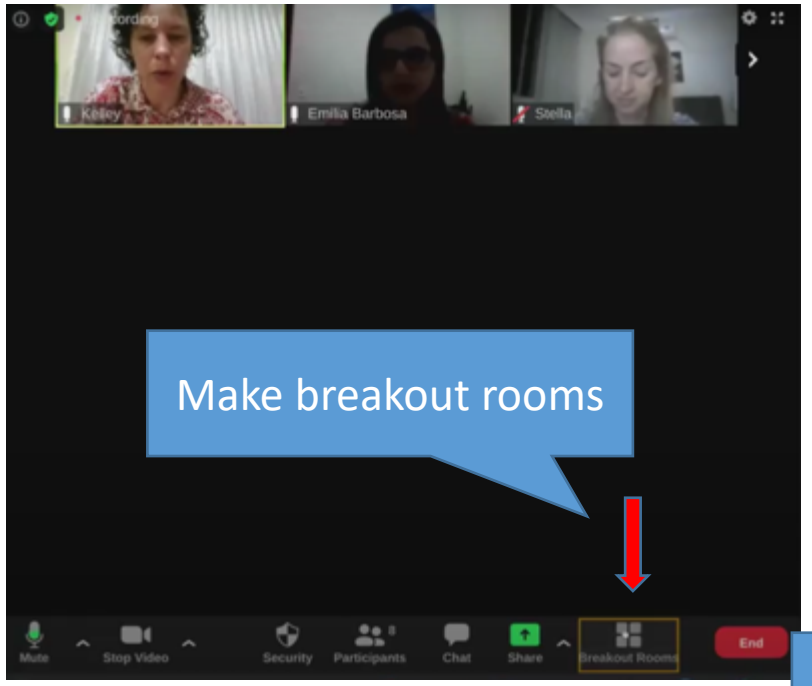
1	1
1	1

- **<u>Breakout Room 2</u>**: Reasons why school should be in person during the pandemic.

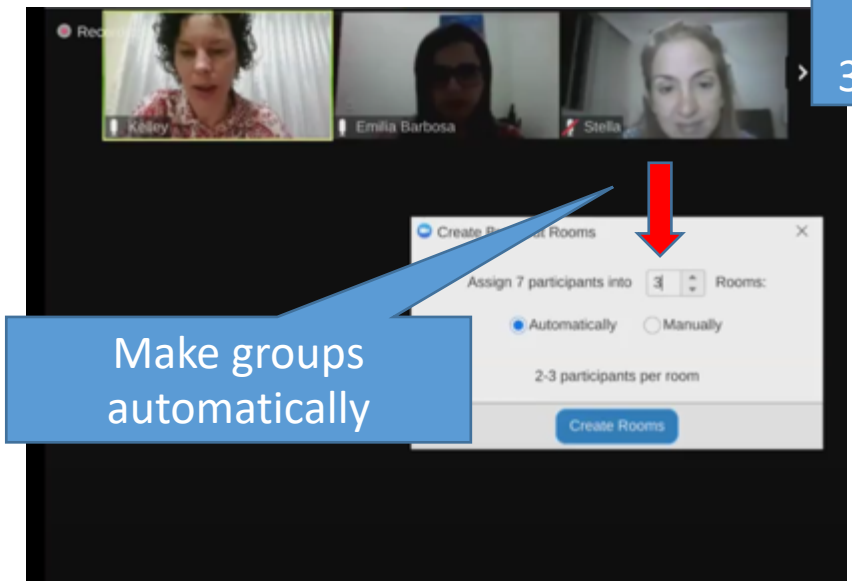
2	2
2	2

- **<u>Breakout Room 3</u>**: Reasons why schools should follow a hybrid model during the pandemic.

3	3
3	3

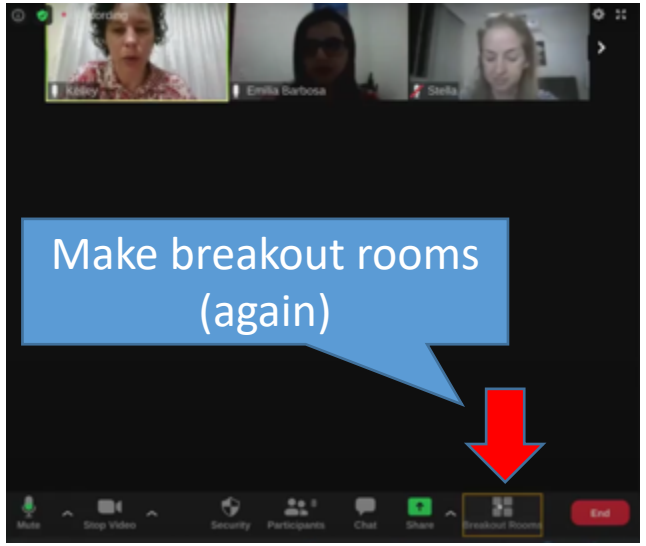


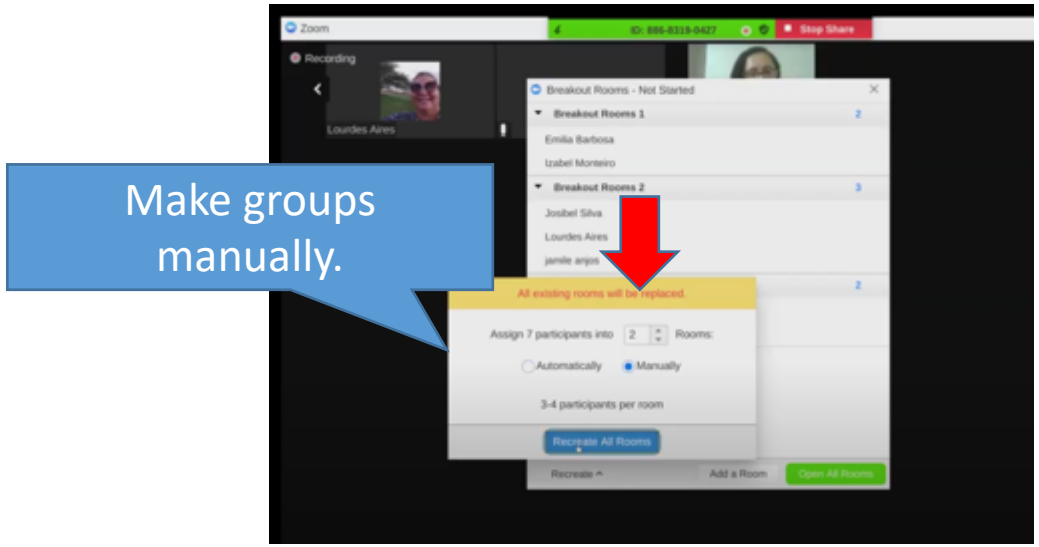
Do your math:
9 students =
3 groups of 3 students



Round 2:

- Discuss the options in mixed groups and decide which you think is the best.
- Choose a group leader to share your group's opinion.





Mixed groups = 1 person from each original "home" group

1	2
3	

Round 3:

- Debrief as a big group
- Team leaders share
- Teacher facilitates

Four Practical Activities

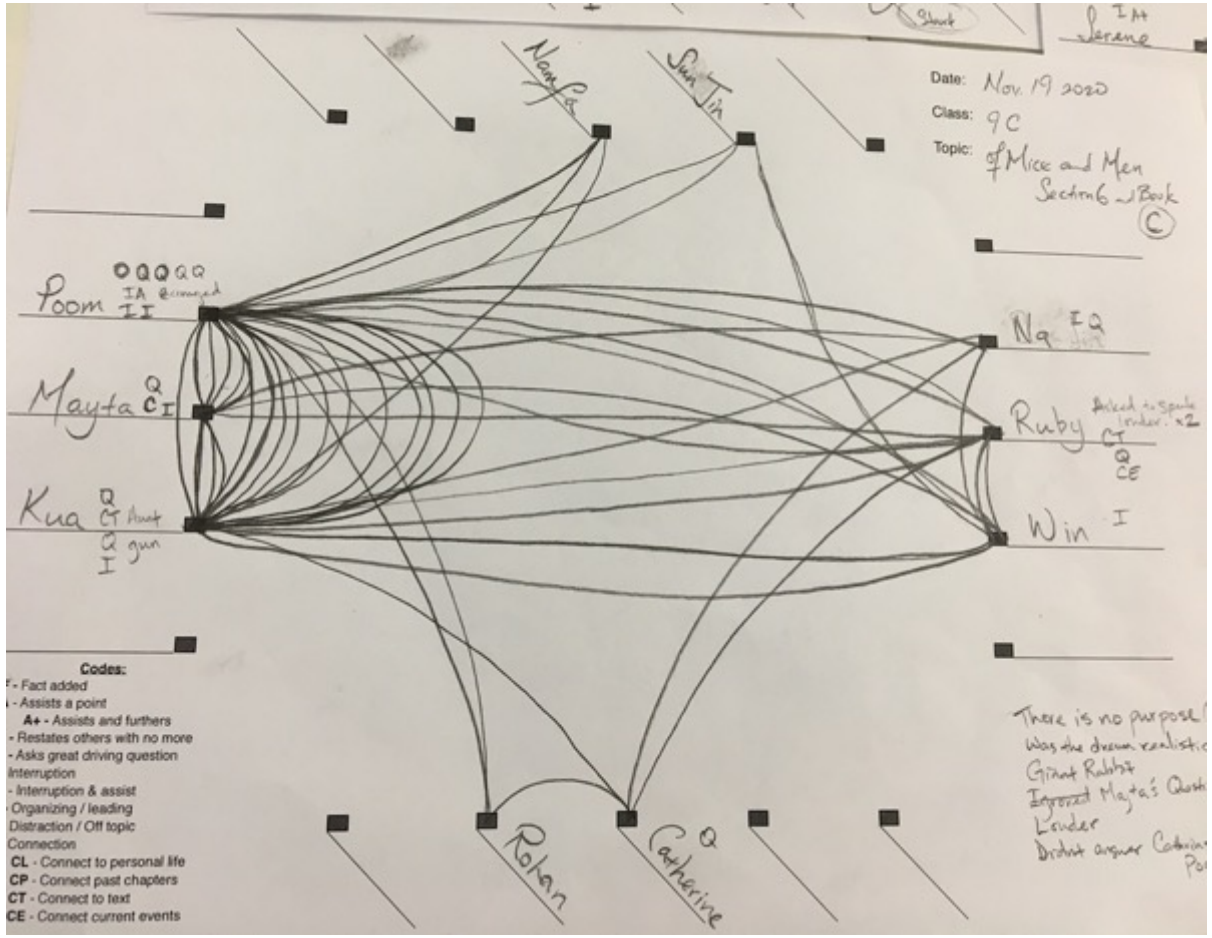
1. Inner Circle – Outer Circle
2. Chalk Talk
3. Jigsaw
4. Spider Web Discussion

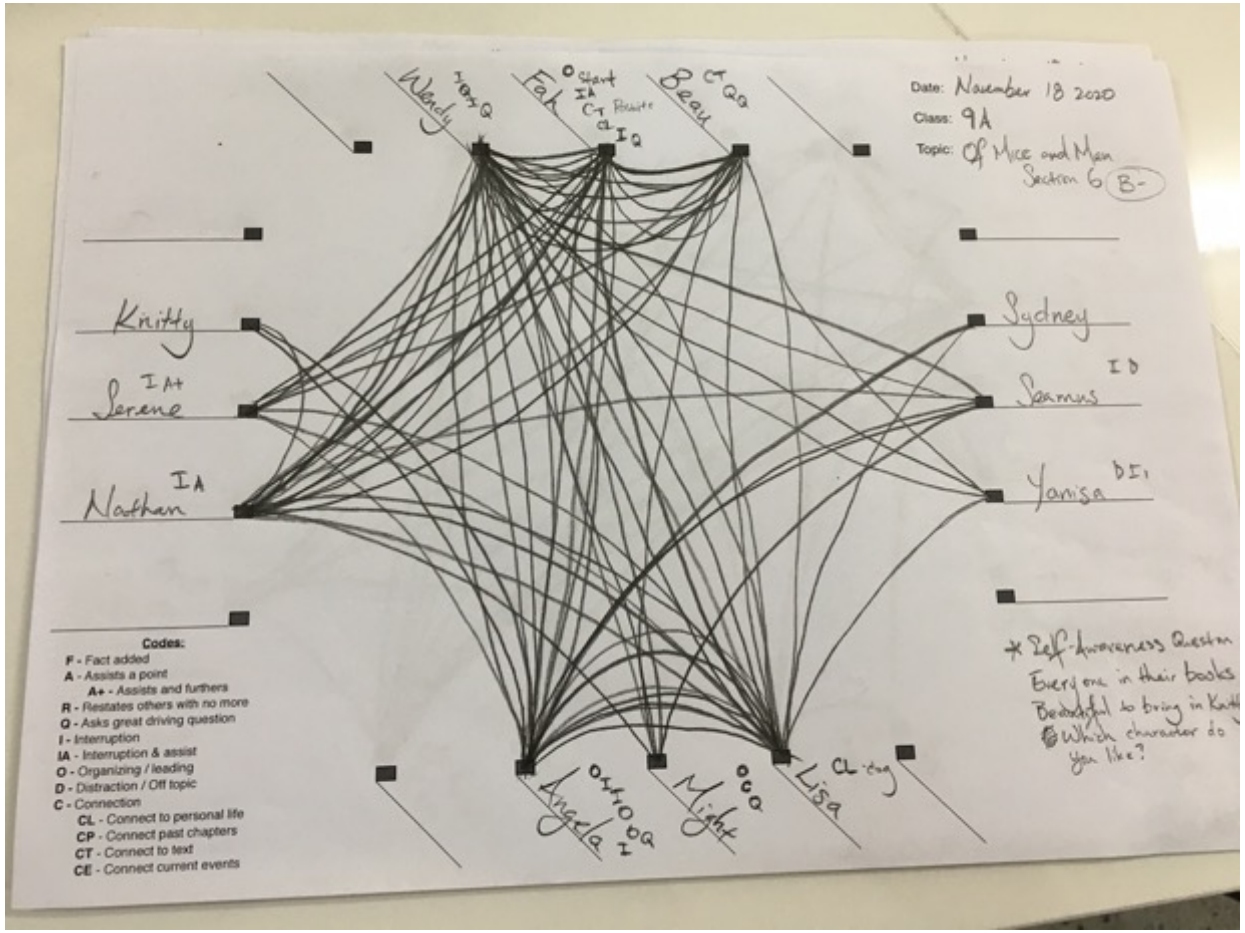
How do you assess student discussion?

Spider Web Discussion

- Students prepare for discussion on a given topic, text, or Ted Talk before class.
- Students sit in a circle facing each other.
- Students talk for a set amount of time.
- Teacher observes and takes notes using template.

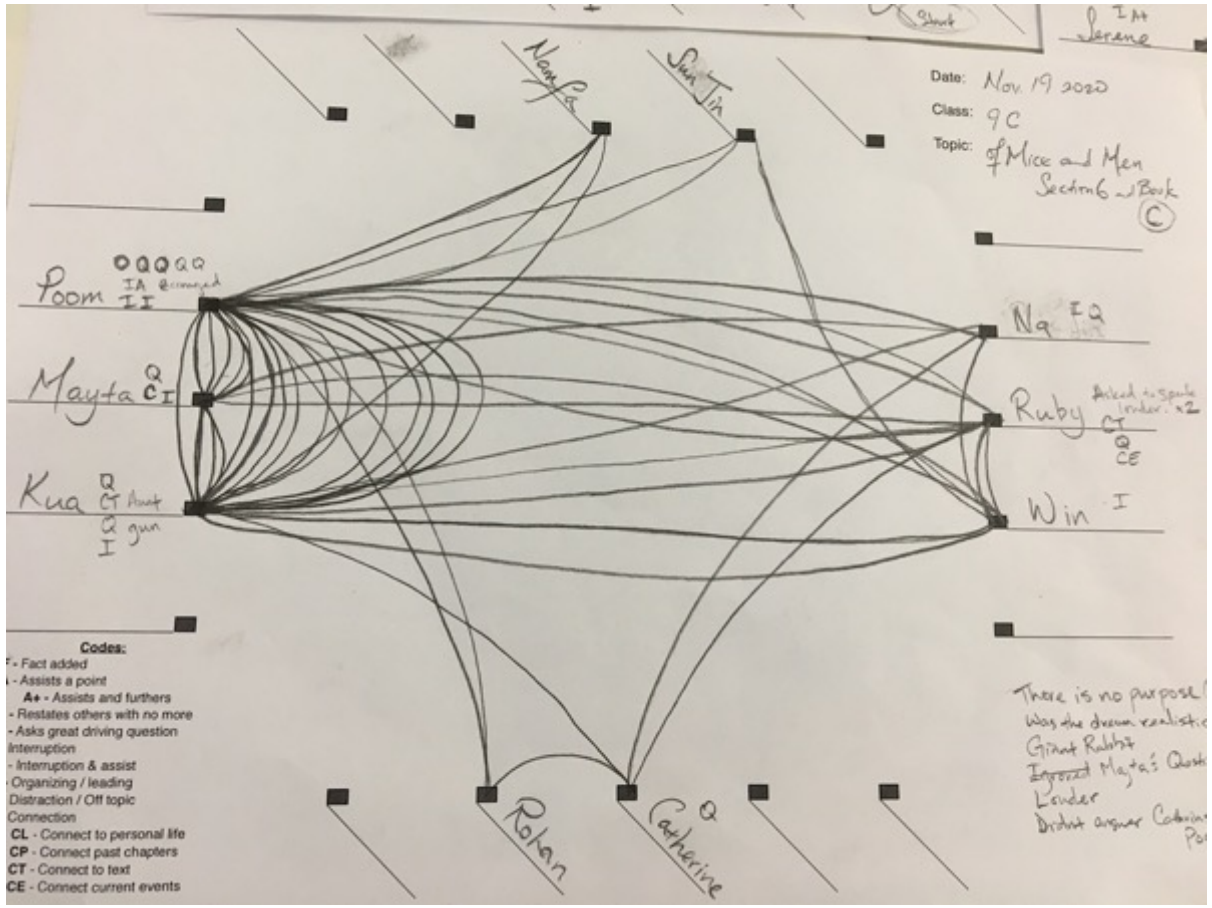
Teacher's Role: Formative Assessment

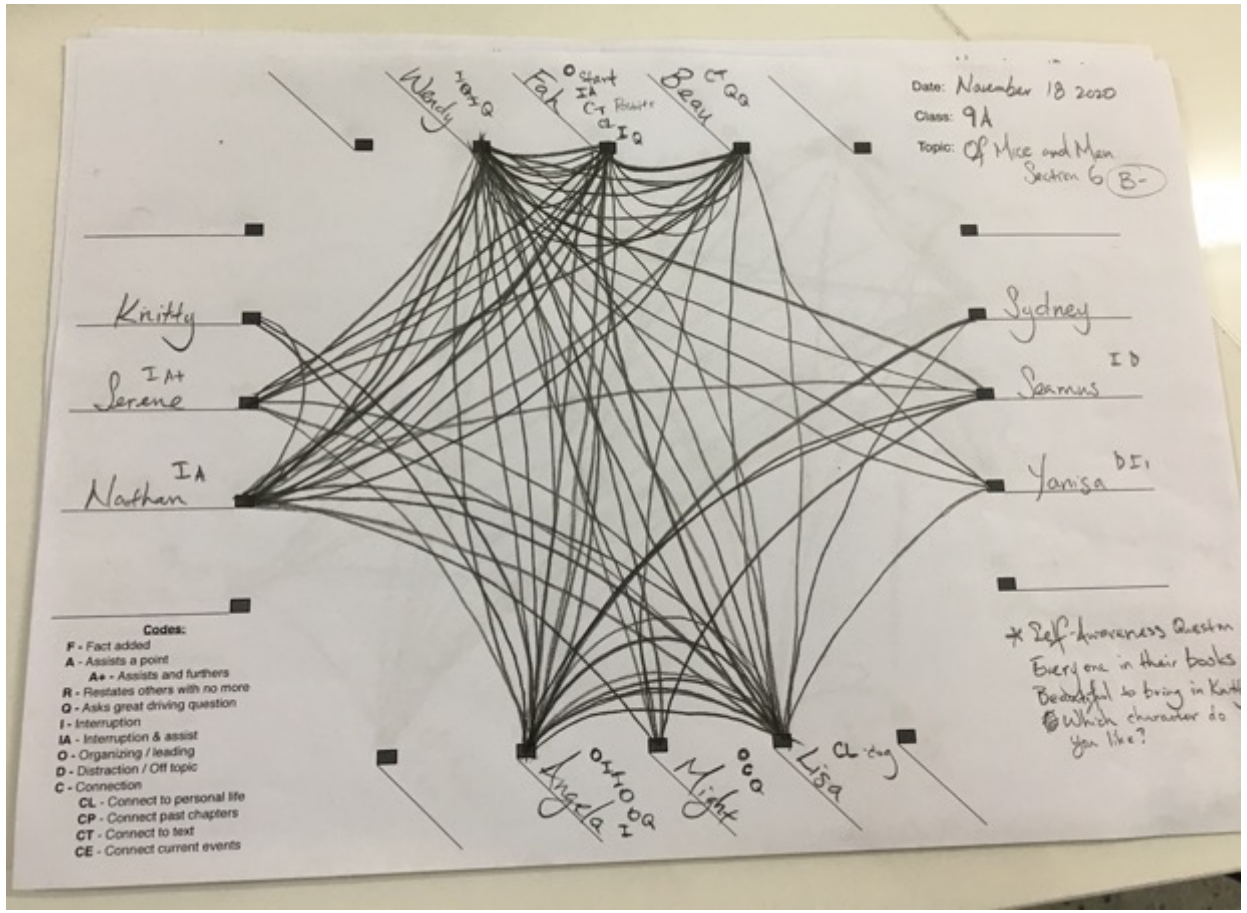




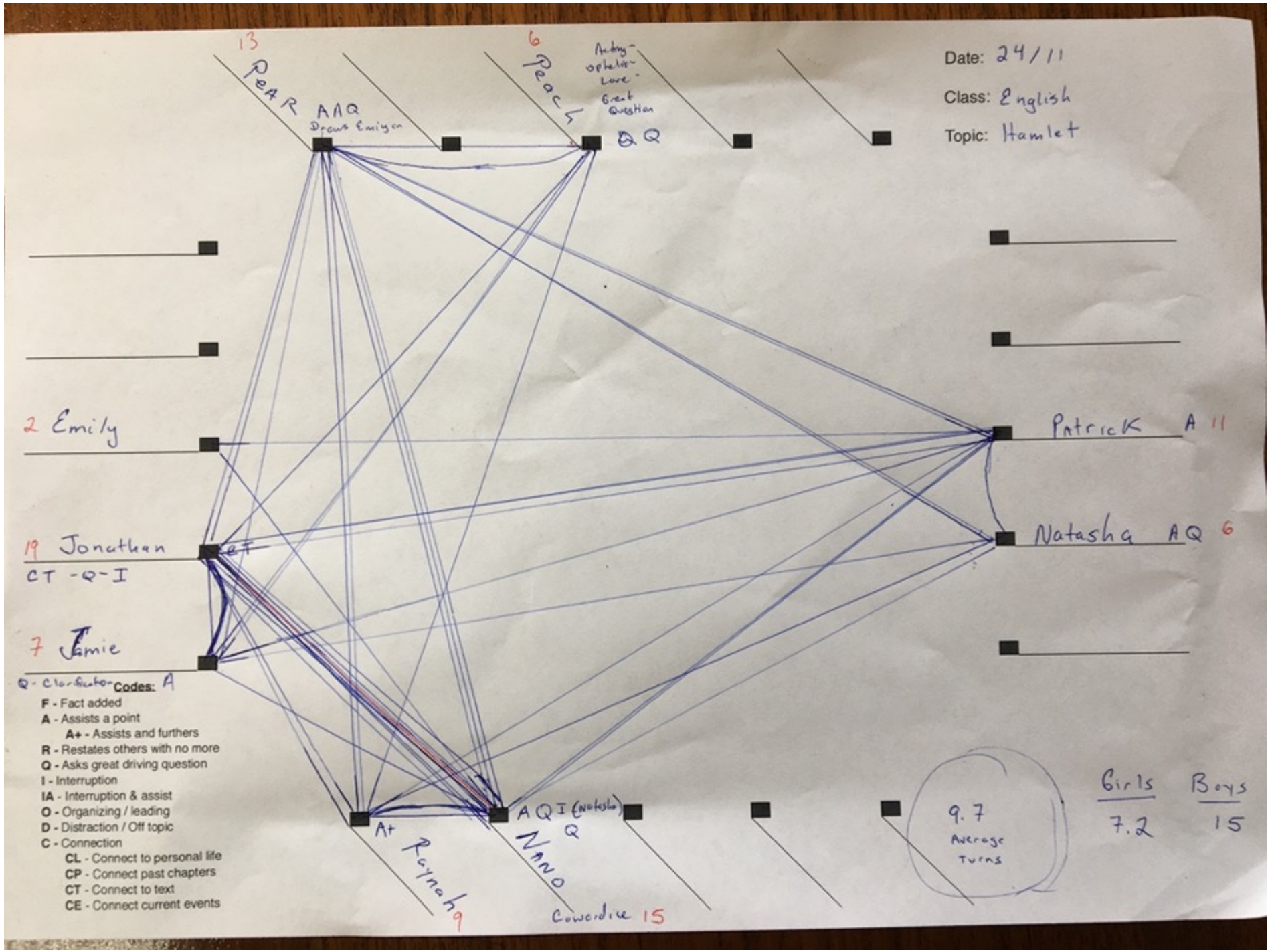
What do you notice about the turn-taking or pattern of interaction in these two spider webs?

Are students participating equally?





Data!



Date: 24/11
Class: English
Topic: Hamlet
13 PeAR AAQ
Draws Emilyon
6 Peach
Acting - ophelia - Love - Great Question
QQ
2 Emily
19 Jonathan
CT -Q-I
7 Jamie
Q - Clarification
Codes: A
F - Fact added
A - Assists a point
A+ - Assists and furthers
R - Restates others with no more
Q - Asks great driving question
I - Interruption
IA - Interruption & assist
O - Organizing / leading
D - Distraction / Off topic
C - Connection
CL - Connect to personal life
CP - Connect past chapters
CT - Connect to text
CE - Connect current events
Patrick A 11
Natasha AQ 6
A+
Raynah 9
AQI (Natasha)
Q
NANO
Cowardice 15
9.7
Average Turns
Girls
7.2
Boys
15

Spiderweb discussion is also adaptable to the online class format!

Summary of Today's Session

1. Spider Web Warm-up and Introduction
2. Principles of Communicative Language Teaching
3. Advantages and Disadvantages of Discussion
4. Addressing Disadvantages
5. Four Practical Discussion Activities

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Which one do you think will be most useful in your class?

- Inner Circle – Outer Circle
- Chalk Talk
- Jigsaw Discussion
- Spider Web Discussion

References

- Burke, A. (2011). Group work: How to use groups effectively. *The Journal of Effective Teaching, 11*(2), 87-95.
- Pham, H. H. (2005). Imported communicative language teaching. Implications for local teachers. *English Teaching Forum, 43*(4), 2-9.
- Richards, J. *Communicative language teaching today.* New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ritchhart, R. Church, M. & Morrison, K. (2011). *Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wiggins, A. (2017). *The best class you never taught: How spider web discussion can turn students into learning leaders*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- "question mark" by WingedWolf is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
- "Bicycle Chain Wear" by Streetsweeper is licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0
- "Silk" by Jason A. Samfield is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
- "balls of wool" by Gertrud K. is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0
- "Hacker army" by Rodrigo Paoletti is licensed under CC BY 2.0
- "Hands On USA: All Hands Meeting" by chrismetcalfTV is licensed under CC BY 2.0
- "File:3D medical animation coronavirus structure.jpg" by https://www.scientificanimations.com is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0

Unless otherwise noted, all images in this presentation are the author's own or are "no-attribution required" under the Pixabay simplified license or the Unsplash license.

Reflection Questions

1. What challenges do you experience when implementing discussion practice in your classroom?
2. What are some solutions to those challenges that have worked in your classroom?
3. What are some of your students' favorite speaking activities? What makes them engaging?

Thank you!

Email: americanenglishwebinars@fhi360.org

AE Live - Ning Community of Practice: americanenglishwebinars.com
AE for Educators Facebook page: facebook.com/AmericanEnglishforEducators

AE website: americanenglish.state.gov
AE YouTube channel: youtube.com/StateAmericanEnglish
AE Facebook page: facebook.com/AmericanEnglishatState

AE AMERICAN ENGLISH